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House Judiciary Committee
Annapolis, MD – February 9, 2026

Testimony from the Maryland State Chapter of the
National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML)

OPPOSE HB0544
(Vehicle Laws - Cannabis Use in Motor Vehicle With Minor Occupant -
Prohibition)

Maryland NORML has no paid staff – we are entirely energized by a core group of citizen volunteers and more than 5,000 other Marylanders committed to ending marijuana prohibition and establishing a regulated cannabis commercial market for adults. I have never had any stake or investment of any kind in any cannabis enterprise, nor does anyone in my family, and I have never received any fee or remuneration for consulting with any cannabis enterprise. As an organization, we have worked to reform state and federal marijuana laws for more than 50 years.

NORML opposes House Bill 544, which singles out the risks from cannabis use in a motor vehicle with a minor present and subjects it to criminal penalties—including up to one year of incarceration—without demonstrating that cannabis poses a unique or heightened risk to children compared to other lawful or commonly regulated behaviors in vehicles.

Children are routinely exposed to far more substantial and well-documented risks while riding in cars, including failure to use seat belts, distracted driving, excessive noise, and exposure to tobacco smoke. Children can arrive at school unprepared from second hand smoke, a lack of adequate rest, or poor nutrition. Yet those risks are addressed through narrowly tailored traffic laws, civil penalties, or behavior modification campaigns—not new criminal offenses.

The bill offers no evidence that secondhand cannabis exposure in a vehicle presents a distinct or exceptional harm warranting a standalone misdemeanor offense. Absent such evidence, HB 544 functions less as a child-protection measure and more as a targeted re-criminalization of cannabis use, inconsistent with Maryland’s broader legalization framework.

Moreover, the bill is not limited to impairment, unsafe driving, or demonstrable harm. It criminalizes mere consumption in the “passenger area,” regardless of whether the vehicle is moving or whether any actual risk to a child can be shown. This overbreadth invites arbitrary enforcement and expands police discretion in routine traffic encounters—an outcome Maryland has worked deliberately to avoid in recent years.



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Public safety policy should be grounded in evidence, proportionality, and consistency. HB 544 fails on all three counts. Maryland NORML urges the Committee to reject this bill and to resist carving out cannabis for punitive treatment absent a clear, evidence-based justification.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Luke Jones", is positioned above the printed name.

M. Luke Jones, Maryland NORML